

AT THE SIGN OF THE WORLD'S END

ROTHSCHILD AND THE ROUNDABOUTS

By G. K. CHESTERTON

Whenever a travelling fair, with swings and roundabouts, comes down to Beaconsfield I always go to see it, and generally ride on one of the revolving wooden horses or throw sticks at the Aunt Sally. The latest circus of the sort provides a variation on these sports, by inviting us all into booths not to throw sticks at a doll but to make crosses on a piece of paper; possibly analogous to the game of noughts and crosses. Players are divided according to their preference for blue or red; but there are various additional flourishes about progress and public welfare. I wish I could think that the progress and public welfare would really follow. I also wish that the wooden horses would break loose from the roundabout and gallop gloriously across green fields, as a cavalry charge of the revolt. I think one is about as likely as the other; especially in the circumstances of this particular district. And I should like to note them as a curiosity, in case I am never allowed to write about them in any other paper. Some years ago, by an arbitrary alteration of boundaries, all the population passed automatically out of the constituency of the man they had elected into the constituency of a man they had not elected. These free and independent voters were simply handed over to him like a conquered population, or like serfs tied to the land. He was the Conservative member for an adjoining area, because all these agricultural areas are regarded as Tory in tradition and loyal to the old English squires. And therefore, by way of a final joke, his name appears again in this feudal position; and his name is Lionel de Rothschild.

This then will be the highly pantomimic position on polling day in the little town where I live. All my Tory friends and neighbours, all the honest people who read the *Morning Post*, the most honest of the Tory journals, all the people who have earned to lament the surrender to the Jews in Palestine, do denounce the cosmopolitan treachery of Jewish finance, to curse the names of Isaac and Samuel for being Jewish and not English, will all march merrily off with ribbons and banners to vote for a Rothschild. Over against them there will be a number of my Radical friends and neighbours, equally honest and perhaps rather more earnest, who consider themselves too large-minded, liberal and enlightened to persecute a poor, helpless, oppressed and impoverished Rothschild. They will vote against Rothschild. They will defend the Jew and try to turn him out, as the others will detest the Jew and try to bring him in. But they will not try to turn him out on any of the grounds that one would naturally imagine as likely to set a Radical against a Rothschild. They will not oppose him because he is a plutocrat, or a millionaire, or a mere cadet of a great capitalist house, or a man raised by random wealth above his fellows. Hardly any of these things will even be mentioned as the main matter of opposition. They oppose him on the ground that he has not regularly attended the House of Commons; which is perhaps the only point on which he has my hearty sympathy. They also say that a sacred thing called Free Trade must be protected against a terrible thing called Tariff Reform; which, by the way, Rothschild's leader has solemnly promised not to introduce at all. The others will support Rothschild because he is a Unionist; that he is a believer in the Union with Ireland that has already been abolished, and which Rothschild's leader has also solemnly promised not to attempt to restore. In short, whether they vote for Rothschild or against Rothschild, they will all vote against themselves.

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They will elect a man solely to support things which he is admittedly not going to support, or even to have the chance to support. Such genuine political opinions as these people ever do express in private they are going to do their best to frustrate in public. Some of their opinions agree with mine, and some do not agree with mine; but none of their opinions will agree with their votes.

With a small working model like that immediately under my nose, I am not likely to repent my refusal to take the General Election seriously. Nor indeed are most of my neighbours, whether Tory or Radical, taking it very seriously. It has very largely ceased even to be taken frivolously; it has ceased to be a sport and become a routine. The only argument against this is that routine means Rothschild; the people will, so to speak, elect him in their sleep. But if I were to attempt to wake them up, by going out into the street and telling them any of the real reasons for rejecting a Rothschild, it is certain that every political organisation would reject me. If I were asked why all these men making chairs or cutting down trees in the woods of Buckingham should be represented by a Jewish banker with a German name, I do not know which of the two parties would be more annoyed. The Conservatives would be shocked at my disrespect to a banker, the Progressives at my disrespect to a Jew, or possibly to a German. I might try to make the Tories ashamed of themselves, by asking what they would say if a Liberal or a Labour family were posted like the Rothschild family in every foreign capital. Suppose there were actually a Signor Lansburi at Rome and a Herr Lansburg at Berlin, brothers or cousins of our own George; should we ever hear the last of the international treason of Socialism? A man like Lansbury is accused of having friends in every country but his own. But at least he has not got relations in every country but his own—or as well as his own. That is only permitted to patriotic Conservatives like the Rothschilds.

Before I conclude this article, and possibly this series of articles, it is not irrelevant in this connection to answer a question which recently appeared in our columns of correspondence. A gentleman speaking for the Jews asked, in a very courteous and reasonable tone, whether our criticism was not inconsistent; since we sometimes blamed the Jews for Capitalism and sometimes for Socialism. There is no matter I would more willingly make clear in a final summary of my whole position. It is the whole point of this paper to maintain that there is no contradiction here, but absolute consistency. Capitalism and Collectivism are not contrary things. It is clearer every day that they are two forms of the same thing. Nobody will get near it by using old terms like Socialist and Individualist, which have become as rigidly unreal as terms like Liberal and Conservative. We shall get near it only by forgetting names and realising things. There is a certain mentality to which it comes natural that numbers of men should be dependent on great centralised systems, doling out to them their food and work, if the food be ample and the work tolerable; the direction always remains at the centre. Whether those directors are called owners of the capital or rulers of the community is a question which has, in practice, become something like a fine shade. The Bolshevik Commissar has the handling of great wealth, doubtless in an official and impersonal way. But so does the Capitalist handle even his own wealth in a very official and impersonal way. It is too big to handle in a personal way. The Capitalist doubtless applies part of it to himself, in the sense of living more luxuriously than his staff of subordinates; but so does the Communist official live more luxuriously than his subordinates. Perhaps he is practically obliged to do so; anyhow, he does. Put yourself in the position of an employee paid fairly reasonably for routine work in one of the enormous anonymous modern departments of Big Business. And consider how very little difference it would make